

Health Advisory:

Influenza Vaccine Distribution/Ordering

November 23, 2004

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The Missouri Department of Health & Senior Services (DHSS) is now using 4 types of documents to provide important information to medical and public health professionals, and to other interested persons:

Health Alerts convey information of the highest level of importance which warrants immediate action or attention from Missouri health providers, emergency responders, public health agencies, and/or the public.

Health Advisories provide important information for a specific incident or situation, including that impacting neighboring states; may not require immediate action.

Health Guidances contain comprehensive information pertaining to a particular disease or condition, and include recommendations, guidelines, etc. endorsed by DHSS.

Health Updates provide new or updated information on an incident or situation; can also provide information to update a previously sent Health Alert, Health Advisory, or Health Guidance; unlikely to require immediate action.

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Health Advisory
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SUBJECT: Influenza Vaccine Distribution/Ordering

The Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) has received notice from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that Missouri will receive the final allotted shipments of influenza vaccine over the next two months. CDC indicates that 100,148 doses of flu vaccine will be shipped to Missouri providers in December, and 56,095 more doses will be shipped in January, completing the shipments of vaccine scheduled for the state.

Providers in Missouri have already received, according to the federal CDC, more than 757,000 doses of influenza vaccine. Combined with the coming shipments, Missouri will have received a total of 914,300 influenza doses shipped to Missouri this flu season. According to CDC's working definition of high-risk individuals, Missouri has more than 1.9 million high-risk citizens. As a result of losing nearly half of the nation's influenza vaccine supply this season, there will not be enough vaccine for all of Missouri's high-risk individuals. DHSS continues to work with CDC and other states to try to secure more doses of influenza vaccine.

Private and public providers of influenza vaccine, including physicians, hospitals, clinics, and nursing homes, must now order their vaccine through their local public health agency (LPHA). Those orders will then be sent through DHSS to CDC. The vaccine will then be shipped directly to the provider. Influenza vaccine orders must be placed no later than Monday, November 29, to ensure timely delivery. It should be noted that, because of the vaccine shortage, there is no guarantee that every order will be filled in full. However, DHSS and CDC will strive to ensure that the remaining vaccine is distributed in a way that meets as much of the high-risk need as possible.

Individuals who are at high risk for complications from influenza should still contact their personal physician or LPHA to see if those offices have any vaccine or are ordering vaccine. High-risk Missourians should be patient but persistent in seeking out influenza vaccinations. Because Missouri's influenza season typically does not peak until February, there still is plenty of time to get the influenza vaccine and receive its protection against the flu.

Persons considered high risk for influenza and related complications include:

- All children aged 6-23 months,
- Adults aged 65 years of age or older,
- Person aged 2-64 years with underlying chronic medical conditions,
- All women who will be pregnant during influenza season,

- Residents of nursing homes and long-term care facilities,
- Children 6 months-18 years of age on chronic aspirin therapy,
- Health care workers with direct patient care, and
- Out-of-home caregivers and household contacts of children less than 6 months old.

It now is even more critical to focus on individual prevention efforts, as well as making sure that influenza is not spread. Along with the above prevention methods, if a person thinks he/she has been exposed to the flu, or thinks he/she now has the flu, that person should not attend family holiday gatherings where several people would associate in close, social settings. This would also include holiday work parties, church services, school programs, and other settings where large numbers of people will associate closely with others. This is especially crucial for people in high-risk categories that have not been able to get an influenza shot. These gatherings should be avoided for up to one week after flu symptoms are completely gone.

Everyone can take practical steps to help prevent spread of flu:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Keep your distance from others if you're sick.
- When possible, stay home from work, school, and errands when you are sick, and don't send your children to daycare or school if they are sick.
- Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing.
- Wash your hands often.

Individuals over age 65 and those with chronic medical conditions such as heart disease and diabetes should discuss obtaining pneumococcal vaccine with their physicians. The vaccine is effective in preventing many types of pneumonia, the major complication from influenza.

For weekly reports and other useful influenza-related information, go to DHSS's influenza web site at www.dhss.mo.gov/Influenza; or go to CDC's influenza web site at www.cdc.gov/flu/ .